



**Remarks by Mr. Tom Billy
NOAA Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
at the
2007 National Marine Aquaculture Summit
Ronald Reagan Building, Pavilion Room
June 26, 2007**

Thanks, Michael, for your role in making this summit happen, and for inviting me to help set the stage for the next two days.

I want to focus my remarks on the importance of vision and leadership – in both the government and the private sector – in bringing about the change in direction we’re talking about.

I was struck by that thought as I listened to Bill Hogarth talk about what happened back in 1976 when this nation took a stand to build a strong domestic fishing industry and take control of our fishery resources. I was with NMFS at the time, and I can tell you it didn’t happen without a unified vision and strong national leadership to execute that vision.

We are here today because of the leadership of the Administration and the Secretary of Commerce. They are continuing a commitment our government first made more than a century ago to ensure that we as a nation could feed not just our own people but many around the world as well.

And I agree with Bill. If we commit the same kind of energy and resources that have helped us succeed in the past, we can do it again with aquaculture.

Over the next two days, we want to hear from you. It is your opportunity to contribute to a unified vision of the future for U.S. aquaculture, and to provide your priorities for what needs to be done to turn that vision into reality.

Bill mentioned the futurist Alvin Toffler and his work on how societies respond to change. Our advisory committee, the MAFAC, has taken on the role of looking to the future so we can be prepared for what’s coming and help the Department shape the future. For example, we want to envision what fisheries will look like 20 years from now, and what role aquaculture will play in that picture.

As part of that, our advisory committee asked NOAA to develop a strategic plan outlining what the government needs to do to develop America's domestic aquaculture industry. NOAA's ten-year plan is now complete. But Congress needs to provide the necessary mandate, regulatory structure, and funding to support that plan.

As Bill Hogarth pointed out, we have the ability and the experience to take American aquaculture to a new level. But Congress needs to make the investments in staff, program support, economic incentives and development grants that must be made if the United States is to realize its aquaculture potential. We need to do a better job of supporting our coastal aquaculture industry, including shellfish farming, as well.

And Congress needs to approve legislation to establish a federal regulatory framework for offshore aquaculture. That would allow all of us to take the first significant steps into this new broader frontier.

NOAA has already moved to provide the regulatory framework for industry to establish seafood marketing councils to help market its products and educate the consumer about the benefits of eating seafood. That's a great example of government providing tools that industry can use to move forward.

Speaking of seafood and health, in 2005 NOAA co-hosted an international conference on Seafood and Health that highlighted scientific studies about the health benefits of seafood.

And since that conference, other studies have confirmed that the benefits of eating seafood far outweigh the risks. In fact, one of the most important studies on the benefits of eating seafood was published by a member of today's first panel, Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian of Harvard University. Another recent study followed nearly 12,000 pregnant women and their children in the United Kingdom. While our FDA cautions pregnant women to limit their seafood intake to 12 ounces a week, these researchers found that more is better – pregnant women who ate more than that recommended amount of seafood had children with better brain function.

But the health benefits of seafood go far beyond brain function. As we continue to struggle with obesity and heart disease in this country, seafood can be our secret weapon. With every passing day, clinical trials and other studies confirm the health benefits of seafood. That means that U.S. aquaculture can play a major role in benefiting public health in the future.

But aquaculture can do even more. One of the disturbing findings of the British study was that the children of poor women had less developed brain function because their mothers couldn't afford to eat as much seafood as the more affluent mothers. We can – and should – change that. Aquaculture can make it possible for lower-income people and developing nations to enjoy the same benefits of seafood that the rest of us take for granted.

The global market for seafood – both wild and farmed – is virtually unlimited. But aquaculture has the unique ability to provide a wide variety of seafood at a broad range of prices.

That means expanding the market even more, by making seafood available and affordable for a larger portion of the world's population.

We in the United States can take U.S. aquaculture to the next level. But will we?

We will – if Congress provides the necessary support....if opponents and supporters join forces to develop a vigorous domestic aquaculture program that works for all America...by balancing the interests of all stakeholders.

In 1889, Congress elevated the Department of Agriculture to a cabinet level agency, and with that, committed the resources and energy of the federal government to help U.S. farmers and ranchers feed America and many around the world.

But today, we're falling behind the rest of the world when it comes to seafood. We can change that if we, as a nation, are willing to make the same kind of commitment we made in 1889 and again in 1976.

Over the next two days, we will be discussing all the moving parts that need to come together to develop a vigorous domestic aquaculture industry. Each of those components is important, be it investment, science and technology, regulations, or economics.

But the most important commodities are national vision and leadership. Without them, we can do little. With them, we can do anything.

Thank you.